

THE CHAPBOOK

(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

No. 27

JULY, 1922



THREE QUESTIONS

AND ABOUT TWENTY-SEVEN ANSWERS

THE POETRY
BOOKSHOP

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THREE QUESTIONS

REGARDING THE NECESSITY, THE FUNCTION, AND THE FORM OF POETRY

WITH THE ANSWERS OF TWENTY-SEVEN LADIES AND
GENTLEMEN TO WHOM THEY WERE ADDRESSED
BY THE EDITOR OF THIS PERIODICAL

??

The Questions are as follows :

1. Do you think that poetry is a necessity to modern man ?
2. What in modern life is the particular function of poetry as distinguished from other kinds of literature ?
3. Do you think there is any chance of verse being eventually displaced by prose, as narrative poetry apparently is being by the novel, and ballads already have been by newspaper reports ?

The Answers appear in the following pages.

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THE CHAPBOOK: *A Monthly Miscellany*
No. 27. (Editor : Harold Monroe) July, 1922

Notes

WHEN this Periodical first appeared in 1919, it was thought possible to sell it at one shilling a copy. Printing rates then, however, were showing a tendency to increase rather than decline, and after the third number it was unfortunately found necessary to raise the price to one shilling and sixpence.

About the middle of last year there were distinct, though insufficient, signs of a coming reduction in the costs of printing. Pending the materialisation of these signs *THE CHAPBOOK* was suspended for six months from the publication of Number 24 (June, 1921).

By reason of slightly reduced expenses and certain economies in production, it is now just possible again to publish it at one shilling net. Publication has been resumed experimentally and gradually. So far, during 1922, two quarterly issues have appeared: 15th February and 15th May respectively. From the present number (15th July) onwards, monthly publication is resumed. Thus the total issue for 1922 will consist of eight numbers.

Those who are interested in the periodical, and desire to promote its welfare, are particularly requested to send 8s. 8d. to cover a subscription (including postage) for the current year.



The next number of *THE CHAPBOOK* will consist of a Collection of New Poems by Contemporary Poets.



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1. They will not be received if brought by hand to the Poetry Bookshop.
2. They must be sent by post, with a stamped addressed envelope (sufficiently large) for their return in case of rejection.
3. They cannot be acknowledged.
4. They cannot be examined within any specified period.
5. Poems accepted for *THE CHAPBOOK* are paid for one month after publication.

NOTE.—All MSS. receive careful consideration. Sometimes brief criticism is offered, but where they have not been accepted no further correspondence will be carried on regarding them.

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Introductory Apology

SEVERAL people have wanted to know why I asked these questions. I have told them that I will try to analyse my reason. It is obvious that I would not have instituted an enquiry if I had not been troubled in my mind.

It was generally assumed until quite lately that there were two forms of literary expression between which a sharp distinction could be drawn, namely *Verse* and *Prose*; and that the former was of many kinds, but the latter of one kind only; also that the former was the nobler, more important and more edifying.

Verse was called *Poetry*. *Prose*, only where it was desired to compliment it, or to attach to it special imaginative, rhythmical or literary qualities, was dignified by the title *poetic prose* or, later, *prose-poetry*. These assumptions and differentiations came down from periods in which there was little reason to dispute them. To-day, as they no longer hold good, the intermediate term *free verse* has been invented as a bridge between the words *poetry* and *prose*.

Apart from the distinctions implied by any of these terms, it is generally assumed that *Poetry* is the noblest and most ennobling form of literature, and that there is much to be gained by a knowledge of it. On the other hand, it is shunned and derided, and is, in fact, indisputably unpopular. Here is an apparent paradox. But to the question often asked me: "Why is poetry not more popular?" I answer: "Because most of it is worthless." That shocks people, because it is true. I mean that about nine-tenths of it is bad—and that the remaining tenth is *not* unpopular.

Questions one and two aim at discovering, first, what, in the opinion of those to whom they are addressed, the meaning is of the term *poetry*; secondly (assuming that they attach some definite meaning to it), what place it has in the civilised world of to-day, and supposing (as many of the answers do suppose) that it is to be distinguished from literature generally, what meaning or object it has for the civilised, commercialised, machine-governed, religionless man living in the world of to-day.

In question three the word *verse* is introduced for the first time.

This has confused, or annoyed, some people. The object was to ascertain what distinction the answers actually would draw between *verse* and *prose*. Otherwise this question is only connected with numbers one and two, in so far as it introduces the tendency in the world of to-day to use more practical and realistic literary forms than those that, in the world of yesterday, were generally grouped together under the term *poetry*.

My object in addressing these questions to a variety of people qualified in different ways to answer them was to obtain a variety of opinions which, grouped together in print, would form a kind of symposium, providing, if not conclusive in itself, a basis for interesting argument. I think that object has been achieved.

Needless to say, the questions were tried in many ways. At one time the first read simply : " What is poetry ? " But it did not seem fair to be as definite as that.

They were sent to about three times as many people as could be expected to answer them. I wish now that more people outside the literary world had been approached. Fewer of the poets themselves should have been included. One of these writes to me : " At the moment I am entirely absorbed in the preparation of books for the press . . . and dare not pause to consider if they are ' a necessity to modern man ' ! Don't you think it's a little, shall we say, tactless of you to set such disconcerting conundrums to the producers of verse ? But I own that other people's answers will interest me intensely."

Again, I suggested a limit of about 300 words. This particular mistake was responsible, in one case, for the following reply, in which my questions are heedlessly fired back at me. The definitions which I am here asked for are just those which I hoped would be indirectly provided in the body of the answers :

" What a *questionnaire* for a man who is trying to forget books for a few days on Exmoor ! And how can such important problems be answered in three hundred words ? And what do you mean by ' poetry,' ' necessity,' and ' modern man ' ? How do you differentiate poetry from other kinds of literature ? Why should poetry have a ' function ' ? Why do we turn from ' poetry ' to

'verse' in problem 3? If 'Poetry,' *i.e.*, a certain kind of imaginative writing, corresponded to a faculty of the human mind in 1600, why assume that faculty has disappeared or is disappearing?"

Another poet encloses with his answers a letter which is too interesting not to quote:

"Questions about the nature, functions, past and future of poetry do not really interest me and so I have never seriously thought them out. Hence my views are subject to fluctuation. I have tried as well as I can to state them for to-day, June 21st, 1922. If I had expressed my views for yesterday or to-morrow on the same subject, they would probably be found to be irreconcilable with those I enclose. Personally, I very seldom read poetry (I do not hold this up as a virtue, indeed it is conceivably a vice, but it is also a fact); and I always find physical exercise, plenty of talk (with the right variety of people), and intervals of blameless meditation, a complete substitute for poetry-reading. But this does not mean that I do not consider poetry the most excellent of all the arts."

A famous author to whom I addressed the questions replied as follows: "The art of interviewing by *questionnaire* consists negatively in avoiding such general questions, and positively in devising topical questions that not only admit of but irresistibly tempt an epigrammatic answer."

That, anyway, was a definite rebuke. In some cases, where I did not expect it, there was the implied rebuke of complete silence. And two or three of the questionees answered that, if they were to deal with the subject at all, they could not do so in less than twenty thousand words.

As regards the answers which follow, most noteworthy of all is their wide diversity of opinion. Among the definite replies regarding "necessity," where the word has been accepted at its face value, we have: No—Yes, I think poetry is necessary to everybody. . . . No—Yes—No art is ever a necessity. . . . —Yes— . . . always was and always will be. . . . —No—Yes—No—Yes—No—Yes, a spiritual necessity—. . . no longer makes an appeal . . . — . . . is a necessity to the complete man. . . .

HAROLD MONRO.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG—1. Poetry will always be a necessity to man, but the majority of men extract their poetry either directly from work or reverie, or indirectly from inferior sources such as the cinema, the penny-dreadful, or the melodrama. Those who have recourse to poetry, in the specific sense of poems, are, of course, in a minority. Whether it is better to obtain one's poetry from work and reverie or from written poems I am not at all sure.

2. The function of poetry and all other art in modern and all other life is to stimulate the imagination. The function of poetry is not distinguishable from that of other kinds of literature except that it provides what other literature provides in a more concentrated, and therefore a more stimulating, form.

3. If this question means—Is there any chance of prose achieving the æsthetic value of poetry (in the sense of good verse), the answer is No. If it means—Is there any chance of the less excellent replacing the excellent, the answer is that the modern increase of superficial culture may produce an overwhelming demand for inferior forms of art which will swamp the superior forms. In this case poetry (meaning good verse) will be the first to go, though verse (in the sense of bad poetry) might be the last.

CLIFFORD BAX—1. No. For the present, in the West, he is busied with a life to which neither poetry nor clean air is a necessity.

2. To irrigate fields of consciousness that are older and larger than our civilised intelligence.

3. No. In my view, repeated rhythm (which we try to avoid in prose) is the essential quality of verse. Like those that were used by the earlier hypnotists, this repeated rhythm vibrates at a deeper level of consciousness than that which represents us in daily life. Since that deeper level will always exist, and since verse is its natural and most powerful stimulant, I do not conceive that verse can ever be displaced. Verse at its best appeals, I think, to an impersonal part of the mind. Different ages live at different levels.

LAURENCE BINYON—Modern man is an abstraction, whose necessities I am unacquainted with. But as long as the young continue to be young, as long as love and religion continue to move men and women profoundly, as long as certain minds continue to take pleasure in severe and delicate art, so long, I conceive, poetry will continue to be enjoyed 'as 'a means of conversing with Paradise.' Appreciation of poetic art, except for certain popular forms, is limited : is appreciation of literary art in prose any wider ? I see no signs of it.

Question 3 implies that verse has been the usual vehicle for narrative art in the past. Novels, not poems or plays, were the really fashionable literature in Elizabethan days : perhaps the journalists of that period already questioned if the novel was not superseding poetry. Successful narrative forms have always been very rare. When they do appear, they seem to gain a large audience. Masfield seems as popular as Morris. We all read newspaper reports once, never twice. How do these compete with ballads like those of Kipling, Newbolt or A. E. Housman ? Broadside doggerel about highway murderers didn't compete with " Clerk Saunders " !

But possibly your questions are designed to elicit a hope that poetry in future will be written in a prose form. I believe the instrument of English verse has resources hitherto unexplored or undeveloped : but prose-poems, I fancy, will mostly continue to bore.

W. H. DAVIES—Yes, I think poetry is necessary to everybody, because it gives a new value to everything we see or do. All things are better for being seen through the eyes of a poet. No man should be allowed to have a second glass of ale or port if he does not murmur, before he drinks—" Is it not *beautiful* ! "

Its particular function is that it is more intense than any other kind of literature. It strikes with a greater force, because it is more concentrated.

No, I don't think there is the least chance of poetry being displaced by prose, unless the prose writers become greater and the poets become weaker. The greatest danger to poetry is, is—well, damn it all—an alarming increase in the number of bad poets !

[*Answers to the Three Questions on page 1.*]

T. S. ELIOT—I. No.

2. Takes up less space.

3. It is up to the poets to find something to do in verse which cannot be done in any other form.

A. WILLIAMS-ELLIS—I. Yes. In the light of modern psychology man stands revealed as a non-rational creature and he is not ashamed.

2. Civilised life caters insufficiently for the non-rational, mystic side of man's nature, for what you may call "the soul," or "the subconsciousness," according to taste. The function of poetry is to supply the needs of this mystic part, which demands both communication and self-expression. All æsthetic activities are channels of communication between one subconsciousness and another. This need for a pure æsthetic, poetry meets, in some ways better, and in all ways more conveniently than the other arts—I mean a man can have his shelf of books in Hull or the Libyan Desert—he cannot have an orchestra or an organ.

3. No. The analogy does not hold, for according to my definition narrative poetry and the ballad are not primarily poetry at all. They often fulfilled the true poetic function, but only incidentally. Communication between one intellect and another is better carried out by prose, and, on the other hand, the less work of narration that has to be done by a poem, the easier becomes its real "unanalysable" work. Consider as an example of this the difference between "Endymion," where the narrative is a failure, and "Paradise Lost," where the narrative is a success.

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER—I. No art is ever a necessity to modern man, or to any kind of man. Thousands of people exist who have never seen a painting by Rembrandt. Poetry is even less necessary than some other arts, for instance, architecture. What necessity was there for Keats' contemporaries to enjoy his Odes? As Walter Savage Landor said: "The difference between poetry and all other kinds of composition is this: in them utility comes before delight; in this, delight comes before utility."

2. The function of poetry in modern life should be to counteract the universal commonplace insanity by a display of bold, vigorous, and imaginative sanity.

3. Ninety-nine per cent. of modern novels are merely feats of superior journalism. The remainder are composed by genuinely poetical minds. There is no reason why a good novel should not be done in verse, or in prose of a poetical cast.

F. S. FLINT—1. There is no such being as “modern” man. Biologically, man is to-day what he was ten thousand years ago, and poetry has always been one of his needs. In fact, man may be defined as the animal that seeks poetry.

2. Therefore, the function of poetry is what it has always been : to amuse or to inspire, or, in other words, to make men forget death or brave it. There are no other kinds of literature. There are (1) poetry and (2) description and explanation, though these, now and then, are touched with poetry.

3. Prose *has* virtually displaced verse. The writing of verse is like the playing of squash-rackets—very exciting and absorbing, no doubt, to the players, and amusing to a handful of spectators. But the vast majority of us take no more interest in verse than we do in squash-rackets ; yet we need poetry as we need food ; and we get it.

JOHN FREEMAN—1. Shelley’s *Defence* is still the sufficient answer. The one dangerous and stupid heresy concerning poetry is the notion that poetry is a luxury, a decoration of reality, an idle, gilded or ungilt additament, a toy for a few, a superfluity for most, an illusion, a fantastic evasion, an insubstantial simulation. This is the heresy of the unintelligent many, drowsy through lack of exercise. Poetry is a necessity to man, though not to men.

2. I do not know, except as suggested in 3.

3. I don’t think that narrative poetry is being displaced by the novel : the novel itself may be displaced—certainly the long novel by the short story. The long novel may die of a surfeit of indigestible details, and reincarnate its life in a simpler, sparer form ; but not narrative poetry.

[Answers to the Three Questions on page 1.]

Verse is the primitive and native mode of communicating emotion or events as seen by a powerful human mind (e.g., *The Iliad*, *Paradise Lost*, *Sir Patrick Spens*). Prose suffices for the admirable and faithful recording of events, poetry is needed for the transmutation of events by means of an expression which shall be a symbol of the events and also of the unapparent world out of which they are born—e.g., *The Ancient Mariner*, which cannot properly be conceived in verse. The prose marginal is eloquent of this.

Poetry gives a body to the unembodied, form to the formless ; air, light, space.

GERALD GOULD—1. Yes. Poetry is necessary to man *as* man : it is part of him. Without the external expression in words of the poetical part, man cannot fulfil himself : and it is to that expression in words that we give normally the name of poetry.

2. Poetry is to be distinguished from other kinds of literature not so much by a particular function as by its particular aptness for the fulfilment of what is the common function of all literature. All good literature interprets, illuminates and harmonises life : poetry does so more immediately and completely than other kinds.

3. No. Lyrical poetry is on a different footing from narrative poetry. The latter is always and necessarily eked out by passages in which the fire of direct inspiration is lacking. (This is true even of the *Iliad* or of *Paradise Lost* : it is not an adverse criticism ; it is simply a statement of the limitations of the human mind, whether as creator or recipient.) As the interest of narrative was in any case largely extra-poetical, poetical forms could be replaced by prose. But in lyrical poetry there is no excuse for eking out : the inspiration, if genuine, should be full. And it is the universal experience of all ages and races of mankind that this full inspiration requires, for its expression, the sort of rhythm which distinguishes poetry from prose. Under "poetry" I include, however, Walt Whitman and the like. I fully admit the difficulty of drawing a hard-and-fast line between poetical rhythms and prose rhythms. But that does not dismay me. It is a difficulty inherent in *all* definitions. It is impossible to draw a hard-and-fast line between plants and animals ; but we know what we mean by the distinction.

ROBERT GRAVES—[*When sending the questions to Mr. Graves the Editor forgot to suggest any limit to the length of his replies. Thus he did not suffer from the restraint of limited space of which some of the other questionees have justifiably complained. Fortunately it is found just possible to print his article in full.*]

1. I suppose the term Modern Man means ourselves of the scientific and industrial age, and is not limited by the few years that have elapsed, say, since the foundation of the Poetry Bookshop. In either case, I do not find the first question so pertinent as the two which follow, poetry being obviously not a necessity in the sense that nobody can live without it; the greater part of the nation lives very cheerfully and fully without its assistance. I once heard a clerk in a Gas Light and Coke Company dismiss the art in the following words : " Poetry, yes, I did a little of that when I was a boy, reading it, I mean. There was one very pretty piece by a chap called Keats. How did it go ? Oh, yes, I remember now :

I met a Lady all forlorn,
She was a fairy's child.

But, of course, that was only when I was quite a youngster." The interest in that remark lies for me in the implied criticism which makes poetry merely a plaything for the nursery or at best a temporary sop for romantic boyhood, and cannot regard it as having any use for man's estate. But if it were suggested that the daily newspaper reading or the occasional novel was taking the place of poetry in that clerk's life I would deny that this was a true statement of the case. There are things which poetry does beyond the rivalry of prose.

The chief " necessity " claimed for poetry in this mechanical age is the freeing of the mind from the cramping terror of the determinate view of life, the enslaving fetters of time and space which are being welded more and more closely every day on our industrial body. The realism of the newspaper and the classicism of the cheap novel does not help much here. Poetry, we acknowledge, opens the gates of that magic garden where whatever is wanted, is ; where are no timetables, neither clocks, no speedometers nor compasses, the kingdom of primitive thought. But poetry has not the monopoly of selling tickets for this magic garden ; entrance can be gained any

day and in a few minutes with the simple apparatus of corkscrew, tumbler and a magnum or two of champagne, or with the handy hypodermic syringe. The richer classes of the community have been made independent of the poet by the revival of dancing ; dancing had its great vogue during the war, when the danger instincts, deeply stirred by the fear of bombs and bullets, demanded a compensating stirring of the amatory instincts ; and the dance was a convenient vent. The sensuous imagery and rhythmic fox-trotting of a war-time fancy dress ball, with champagne opening the gates of the magic garden and an air-raid in progress a few miles away—that was life very complete and needing no poet to celebrate it. Among the poorer classes the greatest rival of all to poetry is the football match, where these three principal parts of poetry : (a) the regression to the primitive state of thought as a means of escaping the determinate ; (b) the pictorial sublimation of the hunting and danger instincts ; and (c) the rhythmic expression, are found all together as in the ball. Watch the emotional and even infantile functioning of the crowd-mind at a Cup Final : the conflict is staged with great force and simplicity, the rhythmic ebb and flow of the game is concurrent with the excited shouting of rival supporters, and the whole business provides the sports enthusiast with a *catharsis* identical in operation with the *catharsis* attained by Aristotle's fellow citizens at a state performance of Aeschylus.

While therefore industrialism survives in its present form, and the bulk of the nation does not need in its daily life any sensitiveness to the finer meanings and remoter associations of words, so long the dance-club and the football field are more fitting modes of national expression than popular poetry.

2. The function of poetry is to provide a sublimation for emotional disturbances in the mind of the poet, and vicariously for similar disturbance in the readers for whom the poet is acting spokesman. Poetry comes from the unconscious mind of the poet, and after perhaps a slight modification of purely personal imagery in favour of a more universal symbolism, it acts on the reader's unconscious mind by means of suggestion with the hidden associations of this

imagery. Rhyme, metre, alliteration and the texture of vowels and consonants are all inducements to a hypnotic state in which the mind will on suggestion work primitively by associative thought and not by traditional logic. There is a simultaneous musical *catharsis* by rhythmic variation on the metrical pattern, of the nature of which we understand little. Prose in its purest form is the appeal to logical thought without any hypnotic inducement to associative thinking. Prose poetry is the appeal to associative thinking, but without the completer hypnotic control of true poetry. When I speak of the escape from the determinate to a sense of freedom I must explain this paradox that the freedom is only attained by creating an artificial determinate and acting as voluntary servant to it. We are, in this year of the Genoa Conference and the determined effort of the world to recover its lost stability, at the point where poetic thought must soon cease to have any real force even among the intellectual classes if the present divorce of poetry and contemporary life continues. The poet, instead of escaping into a *petite culture* of nightingales, farthingales, Keats and parrakeets, must prepare to overtake, understand and recreate the scientific, religious, ethical and philosophic theories that are current. Merely to overtake is not enough. The famous Newdigate poem of a hundred years ago on "Inoculation," with its memorable classical opening :

" Inoculation, heavenly maid, descend ! "

is only one stage further from poetry than Mr. Noyes' understanding but realistic treatment of the advance of science in his *Torch Bearers*. Re-creation is the final stage.

The poet, if he is a poet in the fullest sense of the word, must stand in the middle of the larger society to which he belongs, and reconcile in his poetry the conflicting views of every group, trade and class in that society : he must be before he is a poet in any full sense, scientist, philosopher, mechanic, clerk, bagman, journalist—not less than natural historian, litterateur, child and lover. But science versified crude or journalism versified crude are no nearer to and no further from poetry in its fullest sense than Georgian natural history at its dullest or my own children's poems at their most infantile.

The last poet to accomplish the feat of complete spokesmanship for the nation was Shakespeare ; before him only Chaucer. No others succeeded memorably. The new poetry, if it is ever written in our age, that is, if the cleavage is not always too great, will be of a form of which we can have at present no conception, beyond knowing that it must be a reconciliation between scientific and philosophic theory on the one hand, and the old pulse of love and fear on the other, and that when it first appears the purely literary press will explode against its unintelligibility and the scientific press will disregard it. If it does not come, then we will have to be content with football, the dance and similar alternatives, and posterity may or may not restore poetry to its lost dignity as a national expression. But the general economic situation will be a determining factor of first importance in deciding poetry's fate.

FORD MADOX HUEFFER—1. Poetry always was, and always will be, a necessity for the human being. Verse-reading and verse-selling are no doubt temporarily in a decline, and will so remain until verse-poets make their verses interesting to grown men.

2. The function of poetry in the Republic is still, always has been, and always will be to instil imagination—that is, sympathetic insight!—into the Human Brute that man is. It civilises. Rhythms or broken rhythms are a necessity for humanity. If it cannot get verse that interests it it will hum “Tumty-tumty-tumty-tum” whilst lacing up its boots, or will revel in formally rhythmic or jazz music. Its reading will be novels and the newspapers.

3. Creative prose *is* poetry ; the novel is narrative poetry and displaces nothing. The success of Messrs. Kipling and Masfield proves that when verse-poets will write of subjects or in frames that interest adult humanity they can secure large followings in modern Anglo-Saxondom. Hardly anyone—naturally enough—wants to read imitations of Milton or the Jacobean poets written in frames of mind inspired by the Shelleyan or Keatsian attitude to life. Purity and refinement are no doubt good things, but you cannot expect to sell vegetables if you grow them on sterilised soil in vacuum

chambers. But if verse-poets only want to be awarded " marks " for poetical compositions by refined yet illiterate professional critics of professorial rank and attainments : well, that is quite a good, gentlemanly, spare-time occupation. But it has nothing to do with poetry, neither will it " sell." Or " live."

But why drag in the newspaper reports as the villains of the piece ? Servants always did gossip at backdoors ; masters and mistresses, poets, novelists, business men—and particularly solicitors !—always did gossip in parlours or offices ; washerwomen over soiled clothes, officers on parade, ploughmen under the hedge. Gossip is as much a necessity as oxygen for humanity : it always has and always will take up the major portion of human leisures and interests. For the lonely people of large cities the daily press nowadays supplies vicarious inter-human oxygenation moderately well, supplemented as it is by the fiction of commerce. But if anyone supposes that, say, Elizabethan gentlemen spent five minutes over reading *Lear* whilst they had eight hours a day for the discussion of dainty gossip hinted at in the Sonnets, that person is probably mistaken. No, the daily press has nothing to do with the lack of " poetry-sales " in the modern world !

If the conductor of this periodical could secure a good, rattling account in rhymed verse of a late murder, with names of ladies of title hinted at with asterisks and startling insight into the psychology of the murdered unfortunate, and if the Poetry Bookshop has the distributing organisation and could do it for one penny, those rhymed verses would sell two million, six hundred copies. If, in addition, it was poetry, it would be an immortal masterpiece of the type of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*—or the *Cenci* !

HOLBROOK JACKSON—1. No. It is a necessity to some men and women in all ages.

2. I don't know, and I have never met anybody who did. But it is probably one of the means of capturing and maintaining, or even creating, emotional, spiritual or imaginative experiences.

3. Since a great many people at certain times in their lives are impelled to write verse, and the majority of people at most times in

[Answers to the Three Questions on page 1.]

their lives are repelled from reading verse, it would seem that the practical appreciation of verse as a medium of expression is not commensurate with the facility of its production. The habit of prose would seem to have become so firmly established that not even the worst poetry is capable of supplanting it.

EDWARD JOHNSTON—1. Yes ; poetry in some shape is essential to the life of civilised man.

2. As distinguished from other kinds of literature poetry consists of verse having a rhythm or music. The poet is a seer : poetry, by its vision and music, is a lifegiver and a healer. Its function does not change—more life is always a necessity and there are always maladies to heal. The chief maladies of “ modern life ” are, perhaps, poor vision and apathy : these diseases or weaknesses of the spirit should be most effectively touched by rhythmic verse which moves the spirit by its direct effect on the body and the soul (*i.e.*, on the senses and the heart).

3. The comparative quantity of verse may diminish, but while language remains children will continue to use and make jingles, youths will make rhymes, and men will make verses.

GALLOWAY KEETES—1. I disdain to consider question 1. The universally elevating and ennobling influence of Poetry is well recognised.

2. The function of Poetry (or verse) is to create, relate, challenge, provoke and elevate. Poetry lifts the mind out of itself. It is concerned with the Larger Verities, the Greater Vision and all High Effort.

3. “ Verse ” or Poetry (surely the terms are synonymous) create in themselves, or through themselves, an ecstasy that defies the encroachment of mere prose. I have loved Poetry since early childhood. I am surprised that its Everlasting Supremacy should be challenged.

- T. STURGE MOORE—1. I do not know him well enough to say.
2. I do not think it has a function peculiar to *modern* life.
 3. I do not think newspaper reports fulfil the function of ballads, or that novels fulfil that of narrative poetry, or that prose can fulfil that of verse. Of course, men may become so miserable as to have to do without them, but I am no prophet to say that mankind will.

ROSE MACAULAY—1. I am not sure that I know exactly what the word “necessity,” in this connection, means. Does the question mean, have many people a psychological compulsion to express themselves in verse from time to time? If this is its meaning, the answer certainly seems to be yes.

Has the word “necessity,” on the other hand, reference to the needs of the reader? If so, it would be difficult to say that anything is a necessity. “Necessity,” bearing this meaning, becomes a relative word. Necessity in order to live, in order to be happy, in order to do or be what? I can’t use the word in any absolute sense. Nothing is necessary. It seems simpler to say that poetry is a form of diversion which many types of man and woman of all periods, modern and ancient, will probably desire to have.

2. Poetry surely has no separate function; the difference in function between good poetry and good poetic prose is not one of kind but of degree. The best poetry can rise to a higher intensity of beauty and of expressed emotion than the best prose; it can achieve more beautiful cadences and therefore make a much stronger emotional and sensuous appeal. But not an appeal of a different kind.
3. I should think none. The tendency to write metrically seems one of the basic human lusts, though it is not universal.

PROF. GILBERT MURRAY (*A Post Card*)—Such questions are for the leisured classes, not for overworked professors.

EZRA POUND—1. No. Neither is modern man a necessity.

2. What it always has been.
3. No. But with Bottomley jailed, with that very paragon of England,

[Answers to the Three Questions on page 1.]

that compendium of all the ages, tastes and virtues, juggled, imprisoned, fallen, what can these things matter ?

Has not England soused her epitome in the mire ?

Who remains to embody her preferred forms of commerce, writing and the fine arts ? Pale reflections, partial fragments, here a journalist, there a swindler (more careful in his methods), but no compendium, no whole and perfect synthesis.

For further enlightenment we suggest a careful study of *The Sporting Times* (Pink 'un).

Or if you want a more serious answer.

The function of poetry is to assert the existence of a world that Fleet Street cannot drop dung upon, over which the machinery of publishing has no control ; into which usurers and manufacturers of war machinery cannot penetrate ; into which the infamy of politicians, elected or hereditary, cannot enter and upon which expediency has no effect ; against which the lies of exploiting religions, the slobberings of bishops, have no more influence than the bait of journalism or oppressions of the " purveyors of employment."

Or shall we say :

To assert an eternal order, against which " other forms of literature " (*y compris*, the press and the literature of commerce) and the filth masking as humanity, are as powerless as lice or a congregation of jackals.

(*Extract from a letter enclosed with the foregoing.*)

" You are not in reading the foregoing to commit your pristine error of calling me embittered.

I am not the least annoyed with the cosmos, but I decline utterly to consider ' modern civilisation and the British literary world ' as its finest expression."

LAURA RALEIGH, B.A. (Headmistress of Lilliecroft School)—

1. Yes. From long experience I can say confidently that those girls who are more susceptible of the beauties of poetry are the most docile and least likely to cause anxiety, both now and in future life, so that——

2. If mankind is to progress toward a civilisation in which docility and discipline—which is the negative of the faculty of causing anxiety—form the integral inspiration ; the more poetry can throw her spell, with the more swiftness will that civilisation ensue.

3. A thousand times *No*. In the little community over which it has been my privilege to watch during the late internecine struggle, I found that those girls whose parents disapproved of bloodshed and who, in consequence, were kept unsullied by the brutal rumours of victory or repulse—called *news*—and whose minds were centred on the higher and older things of ages past—our ancient balladry for instance—proved themselves more fitting helpmates for those whose task has been the reconstruction of a world laid in ruins by Armageddon.

R. RANDERSON—1. No ; if all the world's poetry-books were burned, life would not cease to be enjoyable.

Yes ; Selfridge's, they say, is a poem by Mr. Gordon Selfridge. I don't know. From Neolithic times bards have helped to mould man's nature, and now it is impossible to uproot their influence. There will always be poetry in the Unconscious.

2. " To exalt the present and the real " in words so ingeniously selected and arranged that they can be recalled with ease, exactitude and pleasure. This unique power could be used to intensify and refine the senses ; to increase the love of life ; and to help the mind adapt itself to the laws of nature as revealed periodically by students of reality.

3. Poetry should be easily remembered (Question 2). Verse has an advantage over prose in this respect, and therefore I think poetry will continue to be written in some kind of verse. But since it is undeniable that rhythms like Swinburne's are monotonous ; that rhymes as banal as Shelley's make us wince ; and that the set verse-forms are stale ; it follows that poets must use a verse made interesting by technical tricks and deliberate irregularities. As their verse becomes more irregular it will more closely resemble prose until eventually . . .

PROF. GEORGE SAINTSBURY—Questions 1 and 2 are rather more general than such as I care to answer. “Necessities” and “particular functions” are mainly relative to individuals; and as to the latter, I should say that poets are like archdeacons—their functions are poetical as the others’ are archidiaconal. In my own case the function of poetry is to give me a delight which nothing else can give.

Question 3 admits of a more definite answer. No one, I think, who has a pretty good idea and a fairly critical knowledge of the history of literature or of the nature of man, will admit that verse can possibly be displaced by prose. Prose cannot give the thrill of verse though it can give its own, and man wants all the thrills he can get, especially the rarer ones.

As regards narrative, we actually have past instances—in the Middle Ages more than once, and again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, if not indeed more recently still, in the early and again in the middle nineteenth—of the insurgence in fiction of the prose epic, apparently pushing the verse one from its sphere and giving way again. Nor could I admit that “displacement of ballads by newspaper reports” is at all a correct statement of the facts.

F. SIDGWICK—1. My first instinct in trying to answer this question is to call for definitions: I won’t insist on asking what “poetry” is; but what is a “necessity,” and how many ages and nations are comprised in “modern man”?

Much turns on the interpretation of “necessity.” Any of the arts which form the grace and amenity of life might be said never to have been necessities, in the sense of being essential to vital existence. But I think “poetry,” however the future may vary the connotation of the term, will always be as much an essential of the life of the spirit as it has been in the past.

“The earth hath bubbles,” and so has the clay. In giving expression to this feeling perhaps I only write myself down an optimist, albeit I am aware that myriads still proceed from cradle to grave unaware of “poetry.”

2. It is easy to answer, "What it always has been," but not easy to define that everlasting function. I suppose one might say that its function is to record and communicate emotions and perceptions by means of rhythmic utterances. I do not believe that it has lost any of its traditional power to move the hearts of men, and I cannot see why its function should ever vary.

3. A misleading question ! Why, in an enquiry about poetry, is the name suddenly avoided and "verse" substituted ? The fact that novels are more frequent than narrative poems is no evidence that the former are displacing the latter ; and "ballads," in the only sense of that inclusive term which admits a degree of truth to the statement that newspaper reports have displaced them, were distinctively narrative poems. The question appears to suggest that, because certain forms of verse have been, or are alleged to have been, displaced by certain forms of prose, *all* verse may hereafter succumb to the silent flooding main of prose. This seems to me to be as probable as that, because the economic and social position of women has improved, and women are displacing men in certain public functions, the female sex will displace the male. I say "as probable" rather than "as improbable" because I can imagine biologists predicting a reversion of the human race to parthenogenesis ; and when that occurs a great deal of what we understand by "emotion" (as a stimulus to poetry) will automatically disappear.

Thus in brief, my answers to the three questions are :

1. Yes—a spiritual necessity.
2. To move the hearts of mankind.
3. No.

SHERARD VINES—I. Except in the case of a minority of persons in whom symptoms of *nostalgie de la boue* are still apparent, poetry no longer makes an appeal, at least in its lyric, epic, and dramatic form : there appears, however, to be some demand for satire, light comic verse, and the works of people who, like Oxenham, are still able to impose "uplift" verse on the public. It was this imposition of "uplift" which sustained poetry, after the enthusiasm of the

mere romantic revival waned, through the Victorian age : but it is now only popular to the "low-brow" public in a cheapened and popularised form which the "high-brows" will not recognise as poetry ; and it appears to be losing ground even among the suburban bourgeois.

2. The chief functions of poetry to-day emphasise its importance ; they appear to be—the giving of pleasure to the writer, the excitement of adolescents, the provision of Christmas gift books, and the exposure of the incompetence of contemporary critics who, in the rarest of cases only, are able to judge it from any other than a reactionary point of view. But it cannot be said to afford a living for a poet, to entertain in their leisure hours stockbrokers, editors, the clergy, H.M. Forces, and other professional people, or to gain promotion for young men in the public service. As far as functions go, poetry is a sinecure.

3. It would not be surprising to find that eventually prose superseded poetry entirely, beginning, let us say, among the Latin nations, and spreading to the Teutonic nations, whose primitive pleasure in rhythm and jingle will probably die more slowly.

If the cinema replaces to any greater extent the music-hall, it will assist popular songs to disappear ; they will only be preserved by collectors of folk-poetry.

It might even be suggested that a step in evolution is represented by the adoption of prose as the sole literary medium.

ARTHUR WAUGH—1. Poetry is a necessity to the complete man, the man who is giving all his faculties their proper pleasure ; but whether "the modern man" realises that or no is another question. There is a story that when the name of an English poet of great distinction was mentioned at Court, the late King's secretary had never heard of him, and added : "Well, I am afraid we don't read much poetry here." So poetry is clearly no necessity to those who do not realise its existence. They do not know what they miss : that is all.

2. The particular function of poetry, I should say, in modern life,

as in all life, is to link the individual with the universal ; to picture the moment in terms of eternity ; and to show even the most insignificant incident or impression as part of the all-embracing purpose of Life.

3. Verse will never be replaced by prose. The instinct for poetry is born in every child, and reappears in every crescent civilisation. Wherever the people have vision, poetry will be their natural form of expression.

ANNA WICKHAM—Poetry is a necessity to modern man, because in the turmoil of to-day, it is more than ever essential that men should understand one another. Poetry is very intimate speech. The function of poetry in modern life is to stimulate, quicken, and inform creative imagination, with an economy of space and time. It is also its function, in this interlude between religions, to generate spiritual energy by rapid impressions of beauty, vigour, and truth. The function of modern poetry as distinguished from other forms of literature, is to demonstrate what is true of contemporary examples of the persistent type " poet " as distinguished from, and in relation to, other human types. One of the functions of modern poetry is, in short, to be modern poetry.

Poetry will one day cease to be written, because all the things will have been said, and all the verses made. Civilisations fall when languages are outworn. Prose will never entirely replace poetry. She will not have time. When the last poem has been written, young men of imagination will run mad at the banality of every word of their native tongue. Baulked of the possibility of poetic expression, they will go into politics, strike their irritations into the roots of society, and bring the structure down.

HUMBERT WOLFE—I. If poetry is not necessary to modern man, then I do not see the necessity of modern man. For poetry is a deliberate attempt to substitute Rhinegold for newspaper currency. Armageddon is always with us, and if poetry has ceased to be necessary to modern man it means that he has definitely accepted a dictated peace. For poetry, as one of the greatest poets has said, brings not peace but a sword.

[Answers to the Three Questions on page 1.]

2. Poetry is to the rest of literature what the violet light is to the spectrum. It is the last and loveliest colour, and points to something invisible beyond itself. The rest of literature points to poetry.

3. If verse means something different from "poetry," then I am not prepared to affirm that poetry in one form may not replace poetry in another. If "verse" means "poetry," then it will only be replaced by prose when there are no longer any spiritual adventures for the youngest son. The oldest will then presumably digest the fatted calf at leisure.

A PLAIN MAN—Speaking as an ordinary man who reads his newspaper, magazines and a certain amount of novels and books of travel, I feel that if there were no modern poetry I should miss something. I can't analyse the feeling sufficiently to say what function poetry discharges in my life which distinguishes it from other kinds of literature. But I do know that in certain moods and at certain times I like to read poetry. Not all sorts. I like comparatively short poems. I find that my attention lags in long poems (say over 150 lines), and that I begin to wonder whether it couldn't have been done in prose. Moreover, I think that the subject should be spiritual—in the sense that it should help to get me out of ordinary life. The wish to escape is the essence of the mood in which to read poetry.

The sort of poems I have in mind are such things as *If*, by Rudyard Kipling, and Rupert Brooke's war-sonnets. I don't see how anything in prose could ever give me quite the feeling that such things do.



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